

Remarks

Claims 1-12 and 14-22 are pending. Claims 23-25 are canceled in this Response. Claims 1-11 and 18-22 have been withdrawn by the Examiner.

Rejections Under Section 112

Claim 12 has been amended to incorporate the limitations of Claim 13. Accordingly, Claim 13 has been canceled.

Claims 13 and 14 were rejected under Section 112, first paragraph, as failing to comply with the written description requirement. The Examiner asserts that the degree of resistance varying from a greater resistance at an upstream part of the separator to a lesser resistance at a downstream part of the separator in Claim 13 is not adequately described in the Specification. This assertion is not correct -- the directional relationship between the areas of greater and lesser resistance in Claim 13 (amended Claim 12) is clear from, for example, the description at paragraph 0029 read in conjunction media path 30, separator pad 58, and ridges 116 shown in Figs. 5, 12 and 16-19.

Nevertheless, paragraph 0029 of the Specification has been amended to explicitly state the directional relationship between the spacing of ridges 116, separator pad 58 and the media path 30. Support for the amendment to paragraph 0029 is found in Figs. 5, 12 and 16 and original Claim 13. The Section 112 rejection, therefore, is now moot.

Distinguishing Olson and La Mers

Claims 12 and 14 were rejected under Section 102 as being anticipated by Olson 5269506. Claims 15-17 were rejected under Section 103 as being obvious over Olson and La Mers 4648930 (Claims 15 and 16) or Olson, La Mers and Oleksa 5895040.

Claim 12 has been amended to incorporate limitations from dependent Claims 13 and 15. Claim 12, as amended, recites that the separator comprises a span of flexible material and a plurality of supports supporting the span, the supports oriented relative to one another such that the degree of resistance of the separator to the movement of sheets along the media path varies along the length of the separator from a greater resistance at an upstream part of the separator to a lesser resistance at a downstream part of the separator.

The combination of Olson and LaMers does not disclose a separator comprising a span of flexible material supported to vary the resistance of the separator to the movement of sheets along the media path. One embodiment of a separator such as that recited in Claim 12 is shown in Figs. 17-19 in which V shaped ridges 116 support a pliable sheet 94 that extends between supporting ridges 116. (V shaped supports are recited in Claim 15 depending from Claim 12.) The Examiner asserts that Olson teaches a "span of flexible material (i.e., the pad 32 is formed from a frictionally adherent material such as rubber, and is effective in selectively opposing passage of paper there-across; Col. 3, lines 47-50, figs. 2-3)." This assertion is not correct. While Olson's pad 32 may be made of a flexible material, it does not span anything -- specifically not supports oriented relative to one another such that the degree of resistance of the separator to the movement of sheets varies along the media path. Olson's pad 32 is a solid body of "frictionally adherent material such as rubber" affixed to a "generally planar subportion 34b." Rubber pad 32 surrounds but does not span "upstanding portions 36." Olson Figs. 3-5 and the accompanying text at column 3. Thus, Olson does not teach a span of flexible material or the span supports as claimed.

La Mers does not teach a V shaped support. The Examiner's apparent assertion to the contrary is not correct. With regard to La Mers, the Examiner states at page 6 of the pending Action:

However, the above-mentioned claimed limitation is well known in the art as evidenced by Mers '930. In particular, Mers '930 teaches a generally V shaped configuration (i.e., separator in the form of a plate 22 having a substantially V-shaped edge region or notch 24 which forms a pair of separator edges 26, 28; col. 2, lines 47-50, fig. 1).

The "V-shaped edge region or notch 24" in La Mers is not a V shaped support in general, and specifically it does not support a span of flexible (or any other) material. Thus, La Mers does not disclose the supports as claimed.

Finally, the Applicants respectfully disagree with the Examiner's assertion that "the above-mentioned claimed limitation is well known in the art", that is if the Examiner is referring to a V shaped support supporting a span of flexible material to vary the resistance of the separator to the movement of sheets along the media path. If the Examiner continues to assert that this configuration of span and supports

is "well known", then he is respectfully requested to provide evidence and, if the evidence is unrelated to a sheet separator, to also show why it would have been obvious to use any such configuration in a sheet separator as claimed.

The combination of Olson and La Mers does not disclose a separator comprising a span of flexible material supported by V shaped supports. Therefore, amended Claim 12 and Claims 14-17 depending from Claim 12 distinguish patentably over Olson and La Mers (and Oleksa for Claims 15-17).

Examining The Withdrawn Claims

Claim 12 is "generic" to the "species" of Claims 18 and 20. (Generic and species is set off in quotation marks to indicate the Examiner's designation of species -- the Applicants traversed this designation as inappropriate in an earlier Response.) The sheet media input structure of the "species" of Claim 12 is used in the printer of the "species" of Claim 20. The sheet media input structure of the "species" of Claim 18 necessarily meets the limitations of amended Claim 12. Therefore, Claims 18 and 20 and their respective dependent claims may be properly examined even if it is assumed the restriction was appropriate.

Again, within the context of the "species" based restriction, Claim 12 may be considered generic to Claims 1, 7, 10 and 11 in the sense that the structure of Claims 1, 7, 10 and 11 could be used in the sheet media input structure of Claim 12. Therefore, Claims 1, 7, 10 and 11 and their respective dependent claims may be properly examined even if it is assumed the restriction was appropriate

The foregoing is believed to be a complete response to the pending Action.

Respectfully submitted,

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